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SEPTEMBER 2017

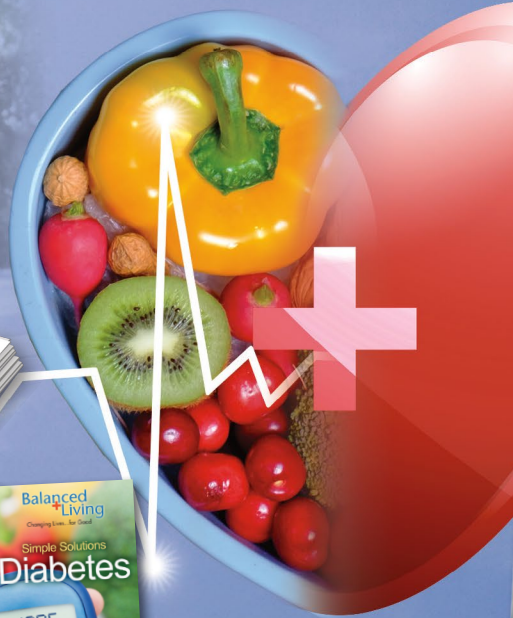
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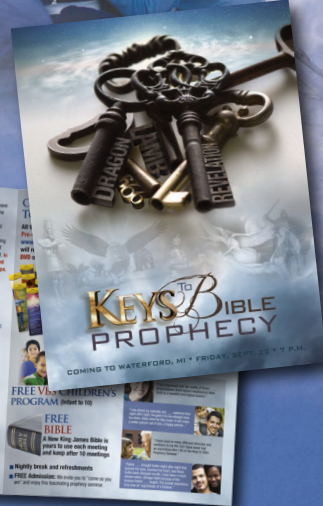


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MINISTRY®

International Journal for Pastors
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+1 301-680-6502 (fax)

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LAYOUT

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SUBSCRIPTIONS

12 issues: United States US\$32.99; Canada and overseas US\$47.00. To order: send name, address, and payment to Ministry® Subscriptions, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600 U.S.A. www.ministrymagazine.org/subscribe.

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Ministry® has been published monthly since 1928 by the Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Ministry is a peer-reviewed journal.

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PRINTER Pacific Press® Pub. Assn.,
1350 N. Kings Rd., Nampa, ID 83687
Standard mail postage paid at Nampa, Idaho.
(ISSN 0026-5314)

Member of Associated Church Press.

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Vol. 89, No. 9 © 2017

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

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Transition priorities

Ministry magazine—how did we get here? It all began with a man called Arthur G. Daniells—but it was a rocky start. The 1922 General Conference session did not begin well for Daniells. He was replaced as president of the General Conference, but he ended the week in a powerful way with a sermon on prayer and commitment.¹

Speaking with tearful humility before the gathered ranks of the church workers, he described his own neglect of prayer. “It is a sin that has been written against me,” he confessed. “We do somehow allow this strenuous pressure [of life] to deprive us of our time for prayer. We must not do it, brethren! I have come to a very serious conclusion that I cannot do this and hold my ground. Can you?”

Throughout the auditorium voices were heard shouting “No!”

Daniells was chosen to establish the Ministerial Association and direct it with a signature emphasis on prayer and spiritual revival for ministers. He organized ministerial institutes which focused on righteousness by faith in Jesus and led to his classic work, *Christ Our Righteousness*. He also emphasized the words of Ellen White, “A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work.”²

Speaking of an intimate relationship with Jesus, Daniells wrote to L. E. Froom in 1927, “For forty long years the Lord has been trying to lead us into that Pentecostal experience to fit us for efficiency in evangelism, but we have fallen into one trap after another and so defeated the Lord’s purpose. Institutionalism, administrationism, financialism, foreign-missionism—these, one after another, have gripped us so hard that we have never gotten the baptism, the most important issue of all.”

These pastoral institutes led to revival but had their limitations. Even with persons such as Meade MacGuire, Taylor Bunch, Carlyle B. Haynes, and L. E. Froom helping lead out, the world field could not be covered adequately. A method of written communication was needed. So, in January 1928, the Ministerial Association began to print a monthly magazine called *Ministry*, with the stated purpose of (1) deepening the spiritual life, (2) developing the intellectual strength, and (3) increasing the evangelistic effectiveness of the ministers.

Today, as we are completing a major transition in our *Ministry* magazine editorial team, these three priorities are still primary. Through a long process of much prayer, searching thoroughly, and sensing God’s very clear leading, we now have a new editor and associate editor to lead us into a closer walk with our Lord, just before He returns!

Pavel Goia, our new *Ministry* editor, grew up in communist Romania. A biography of these years, *One Miracle After Another—The Pavel Goia Story*, recounts in thrilling detail the miracles God worked in Pavel’s life during these very challenging years for a young Adventist Christian in an oppressive communist regime.

Pavel had a wide variety of work experiences as a young man, including construction, topography, and owning a glass and window replacement shop, and also a photography laboratory during college years. He completed college with an engineering degree and worked in that field until his strong Sabbath and religious convictions caused a change.

He then felt the call to pastoral ministry and completed a bachelor’s degree in theology in Romania. This led to his aggressive pastoring and church planting there. Then the doors opened providentially for him to move to America. Learning English as he went, he

finished two more theological degrees, and, while pastoring for a number of years, he has recently completed all requirements for the doctor of ministry degree from Andrews University with an emphasis in church leadership development, specifically writing on prayer in his dissertation “Prayer That Changes and Grows the Church.”

Pavel is a sought after international speaker and trainer on spiritual life, discipleship, leadership, church growth, and prayer. His wife, Daniella, is an accomplished business and ministry manager for war veterans.

His pastoral experience in Romania and the United States led to dynamic church growth, church planting, and a very high percentage of church member involvement and new member retention. We believe the Lord led in this choice and that Pavel’s very fresh experience in frontline pastoring is a great strength in our quest to provide compelling “must read” material for today’s pastor.

Jeffrey Brown, our new associate editor, has also had a very distinguished ministry and brings with him complementary gifts and experience that have already been a great blessing to our *Ministry* team. Jeff was born in England, of Jamaican parents and received several degrees from institutions such as Newbold College of Higher Education and Oxford University, the highest a doctor of philosophy in religious education (family life and counseling) from Andrews University.

Jeff has 12 years overseas experience teaching religion at Bekwai and Agona-Ashanti Seventh-day Adventist Secondary Schools in Ghana. He also served in the Trans-European Division as church pastor and director of pastoral studies at Newbold College.

Jeff then moved to North America, pastoring in Toronto, Canada, after which he became professor of religious



DANIELLE AND PAVEL GOIA



JEFFREY AND PATTIEJEAN BROWN

education and pastoral care at Oakwood University. He then was called to be president of the Bermuda Conference and served there ten years before being called to be director of the Bradford Cleveland Brooks Leadership Center at Oakwood University. He also served as editor of *Family Life*, a publication of the Adventist Association of Family Life Professionals.

Jeff is the author of *Single and Gifted*. He is married to Pattiejean née McMahon, from Bermuda, author of *What on Earth Am I Doing? Leadership Lessons for Clergy Spouses*, and they have coauthored three books: *Total Marriage*, *Guide to Parenting*, and *The Love Seasons*.

I have been challenged and I have grown in many ways as interim editor during these months of transition. I appreciate the excellent work done by the rest of the *Ministry* team, Sheryl Beck (editorial specialist), John Feezer (finance and technology manager), and Cathy Payne (advertising and subscription assistant), along with Jeffrey Brown (associate editor), who has carried extra responsibilities during these months.

The rest of our Ministerial Association associate secretaries team—Jonas Arrais, Robert Costa, Anthony Kent, and Janet Page, as well as Jarod Thomas (communications manager) and I—all commit to being supportive of the new *Ministry* team, lifting them up in prayer as we move forward together.

This September issue has some excellent articles on how to share the truth of the gospel, including the lead article by Derek Morris, previous editor of *Ministry* and current president of Hope Channel, who provides practical helps on the delivery of the message.

Please send us your feedback and suggestions, as well as become a prayer partner with us so that the Lord can use us and *Ministry* to accomplish His will. Let's all be faithful to our specific callings as we all look forward to the soon coming of Jesus! 🙏

- 1 Thanks goes to Kim Peckham, who assisted in gathering historical information for this editorial.
- 2 Ellen G. White, "The Church's Great Need," *Review and Herald*, Mar. 22, 1887.

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Effective sermon delivery

My wife and I were excited at the prospect of becoming parents for the first time. My wife signed up for natural childbirth classes, and I was happy to attend with her. I wanted to be a great father. Toward the end of my wife's pregnancy, her doctor asked me a startling question: "Derek, would you like to deliver the baby?" Foolishly, without much careful thought, I said, "Sure!" I had not even delivered newspapers at any time in my life, let alone babies. I should have been a little concerned when the doctor gave me a small book titled *Emergency Childbirth*, but I read through the book and it did not seem that complicated, at least on paper.

Finally the day came when my wife went into labor. I tried to remember everything I had learned: first-stage labor, second-stage labor. Then the doctor came into the birthing room and said, "It's time to get ready!" I followed the doctor's example as he scrubbed his hands and arms, put on my surgical gown and hat, and headed back into the birthing room. By this time, my wife was fully dilated, and she was ready to deliver our firstborn. The doctor turned to me and said, "Restrain the head!" At that point I was already breaking out in a cold sweat. I gingerly placed a few fingers on the crown of my baby's head, and it was obvious that I lacked any confidence in this delivery process. Without hesitation the doctor yelled at me: "I said restrain the head!" At that moment, I remember thinking, "What am I doing here?"

Soon the baby's head was between my trembling hands. Then the doctor said to me, "Help the baby's shoulder to be delivered." If I had read the emergency childbirth book more carefully, I would have known that once the shoulder is delivered, it is all over—the baby is on its way. But in my ignorance about good delivery practice, I helped the baby's shoulder to be delivered without careful consideration of the implications. The doctor turned to my wife and said, "Push." Before I had a chance to take a deep breath, our baby went airborne between my open hands! The nurse actually took a picture of our baby flying through the air with the greatest of ease. Fortunately, my wife was lying on a birthing bed or our baby might have ended up on the floor.

That traumatic experience yielded two important outcomes: my wife did not allow me to assist with the birth of our second child, and I learned the importance of effective delivery.

What does my experience with the birth of our firstborn have to do with preaching? Simply this—you can have a powerful biblical sermon manuscript, carefully prepared and bathed in prayer, but if you have poor delivery, the sermon can be irreparably damaged.

Elements of effective delivery

In order to effectively deliver a sermon you need to remember the results of a classic communication study by Dr. Albert Mehrabian: only 7 percent of your communication includes the words you speak; 38 percent is the way you

say those words, your oral interpretation; and 55 percent is your nonverbal communication.¹ In order to maximize the impact of your communication, the words, oral interpretation, and body language must agree. If they do not agree, people will disregard your words and believe your oral interpretation and/or your body language.

What is the vital lesson for preachers who want to deliver powerful biblical sermons effectively? Do not spend all your preparation time working with words. Your words are vitally important; but if you do not have solid biblical content and relevant application, your sermon will fail. You also need to take time to consider how you will deliver those words, both your oral interpretation and your non-verbal communication.

Congruent oral interpretation. There are four basic elements of oral interpretation: pitch, volume, rate of speech, and pause.

1. Pitch. Have you ever heard a person sing a song with just one note? We would describe that person's pitch as monotone. Monotone is boring. That is where we get the English word *monotonous*! Variety of pitch adds interest, where the content of the message is effectively interpreted by the pitch of the speaker's voice. Take a single phrase, like "The Lord is my Shepherd," and say it several times using different pitch for different words. You will notice how the meaning of the phrase changes. The pitch you select for your words not only adds interest but also interprets your message. Listen to

successful storytellers and you will be impressed by their effective use of pitch variation to communicate effectively the content of the message.

2. *Volume.* What is more effective—a quiet voice or a loud voice? It depends. If you are announcing, “Lift up the trumpet and loud let it ring,” it would be incongruent to say those words in a whisper. The volume of your voice should be informed by the content of the message. Once again, the key word to remember is *variety*. Sometimes a whisper is more effective than a shout. At other times, you need to project your words like an urgent warning to a noisy crowd.

3. *Rate of speech.* People typically hear and vocalize words at 150 to 160 words per minute.² Some speak more quickly, allowing little lag time for the listener to process what is being said. Others speak so slowly that some in the audience fall asleep before they finish the sentence. But whatever your natural rate of speech, if you lack variety in your rate of speech, you will put your audience to sleep. Have you ever taken an early morning ride on a train? Have you noticed how many of the passengers are sleeping? A consistent rate of speed lulls a person to sleep. The same is true with the rate of speech. Your rate of speech should be varied, sometimes fast, sometimes slow, based on the message you are sharing.

4. *Pause.* Intentional use of silence is important as part of effective oral interpretation. When would it be particularly helpful to pause? Allow some intentional silence after you have asked a question. Pause when you want your hearers to consider something you have said, especially the main preaching idea. Some pauses are brief, others are long, depending on the time needed for reflection. As with other aspects of effective oral interpretation, the key word to remember is *variety*.

Congruent nonverbal communication. Effective oral interpretation is vitally important, but in addition to the 7 percent of words and the 38 percent of how you say those words, you need to consider your nonverbal

communication. What are some aspects of nonverbal communication you should remember when preparing to deliver a powerful biblical sermon?

1. *Eye contact.* Connect with your audience through intentional eye contact. Do not scan the group as if you are looking for a lost child, and do not stare at one person until she starts wriggling in her seat. Look at individuals long enough to make a connection. Preaching without notes gives you a great advantage when seeking to establish meaningful eye contact. If you are reading a manuscript, your eye contact with your hearers is seriously impaired. When speaking to a larger group, choose key people in various parts of the auditorium, making sure you do not neglect any sector. Effective eye contact sends the message to each of your listeners that this sermon is especially for her or him.

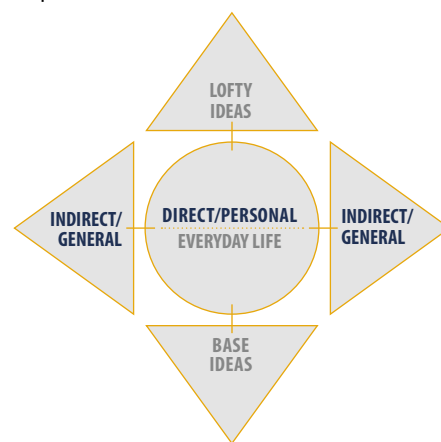
2. *Facial expressions.* People most naturally look at your face when you are speaking in public. If your face is frozen in one shape, your nonverbal communication becomes hindered. Let your facial expressions reflect the content of your words. When you say, “Jesus loves you,” there should be a different expression on your face than when you say, “The wages of sin is death.” Be natural, be congruent, and remember the key word for effective delivery—*variety*.

3. *Gestures.* Congruent gestures are vitally important for effective delivery. Some preachers have a natural repertoire of gestures, but many use neutral gestures without careful thought about the impact upon the listeners. Have you ever seen a preacher who always points at you or pounds a fist on the pulpit? Those gestures might be very effective when describing an angry or defiant attitude, but constantly repeated gestures become meaningless.

Post-sermon feedback is a helpful tool when evaluating the effectiveness of your gestures. On one occasion, I invited my audience to reach out to Jesus, and raised my hand to illustrate that connection. After the service, my son came to me with some valuable feedback: “Dad,

when you raised your hand, your palm was facing the audience and it looked like you were pushing Jesus away. Turn your hand a little.” What great feedback! I tried the minor gesture adjustment in the second service and it was much more effective. Such is the value of post-sermon feedback regarding your nonverbal communication.

Here is a simple framework for the positioning of congruent gestures, involving a horizontal and a vertical plane.



A gesture located in the center of the horizontal plane is direct and personal. If you are making an appeal, “Jesus is inviting you to follow Him,” your gesture should be in the center of the horizontal plane, like two outstretched hands right in front of you. Gestures on the periphery of the horizontal plane are indirect and general. For example, you might say, “There are troubles all around the world,” pointing to the outer edges of the horizontal plane. Don’t place your gesture in the center of the horizontal plane—that’s too direct. Stretching out your hands to one or both sides of the horizontal plane reinforces your comment as indirect and general.

When positioning gestures, the vertical plane can be divided into three segments: upper third, middle third, and lower third. What type of gesture should be located in the upper third of the vertical plane? High and lofty ideas, like God, heaven, holiness, and salvation. When you say, “God is thinking about you right now” you might begin by looking up or pointing your hand toward the upper


third of the vertical plane. The middle third of the vertical plane is reserved for gestures dealing with everyday life. This is where we live. That's why the gesture accompanying the comment "Jesus is inviting you to follow Him" is not only in the center of the horizontal plane but it is also in the center of the vertical plane. Your hands are right in front of you at waist level. The lower third of the vertical plane is reserved for gestures related to base ideas like death, sin, failure, and Satan. When you say, "Jesus wants to save you, but Satan wants to destroy you," your gestures will move from the upper third to the lower third.

Developing a vocabulary of effective gestures will take time and intentionality, but the increased impact on your hearers will be quickly noticed. Effective delivery is never a means of drawing attention to yourself but rather increasing the impact of your biblical message on the hearts of your hearers.

4. *Visual aids.* A variety of visual aids can also be helpful to reinforce content. Those visual aids, like PowerPoint slides, video clips, banners, or objects, should be clearly visible and memorable. The Bible is an important visual aid for a powerful biblical preacher. It might seem more high-tech to read the Scripture passage off your smartphone, but the symbol is lost. Your smartphone is also used to check your email and shop online. Keep your Bible with you as a compelling symbol of a God who has spoken and continues to speak.

Putting the pieces together

If it seems rather overwhelming to put all these pieces together in order to maximize your effectiveness as a powerful biblical preacher, start with a single element. Work on one aspect of congruent oral interpretation: variety of pitch, variety of volume, variety of rate

of speech, or effective use of pause. You might also choose to work on one aspect of congruent nonverbal communication: effective eye contact, congruent facial expressions, gestures, or effective use of visual aids. Over time, you will move from awkward implementation to natural integration. Learn from others who are mastering the art of effective delivery. Watch video recordings of your own presentations and solicit feedback from colleagues and members of your congregation. Learning to deliver effectively powerful biblical sermons will take time and energy, but the results will be well worth the effort.³ 

- 1 Albert Mehrabian, *Silent Messages* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1971), 43.
- 2 "Words per Minute," Wikipedia, last modified August 2, 2017, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Words_per_minute.
- 3 For some additional insights on effective delivery, consider *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching* by Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 589–618.

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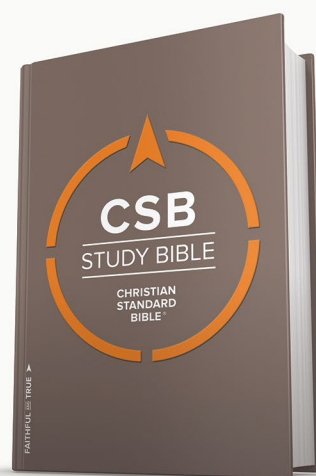
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The book of Revelation: Guidelines for responsible and meaningful preaching

Many Christians have a negative attitude toward the book of Revelation. The evidence shows that this is mainly due to what has been presented from the pulpit and written in popular books. Revelation's prophecies have been the subject of speculative and sensationalistic interpretations inspired by media headline news and current events intended to excite the public.

The prologue of Revelation promises great blessings to individuals in the church, making its messages understandable to the congregation (Rev. 1:3). The text talks about a person (singular) reading aloud the messages of Revelation to the assembled audience (plural). When the listening audience hears, with understanding, the words of the prophecy and responds by heeding them, great blessings are promised (Rev. 1:3; 22:7).

Cautious preachers will be aware that their exposition of Revelation has far-reaching effects on the listeners, whether for blessing or eternal loss. Therefore, it is of primary importance for preachers to acquaint themselves with the principles of prophetic interpretation so that they may be sure that their exposition of Revelation's messages matches the intention of the inspired author who wrote down and

organized theologically what had been shown to him in vision.

This article provides several practical guidelines for responsible and meaningful preaching of Revelation. This is a product of my own pilgrimage and many years of personal experience.¹ The focus here will be on the preparation of the sermon rather than on its delivery.

Have a healthy approach to Revelation's prophecies

The prophecies of Revelation have often been obscured by biased and subjective interpretative approaches. While, on the one hand, many preachers try to match every detail of the prophetic text to events in history (whether past or future), on the other, there are those who deny the book its prophetic character and limit its prophecies to Christians of the first century in Asia Minor. Both approaches are equally detrimental to the prophetic character of the book.

Responsible preaching of Revelation precludes any biased approach. It avoids the pitfall of preterism, which, together with idealism, deprive Revelation of its prophetic character and limits the relevance of its messages exclusively to the Christians of John's day in the

Roman Empire. Similarly, it avoids futurism, which limits Revelation's prophecies exclusively to the last generation of Christians. These methods seem to be deficient because they imply that Revelation has nothing to offer to the generations between John's time and the time of the end.

Revelation claims to be a book of prophecy (Rev. 1:3; 22:7), with its stated purpose being to show us what will take place in the future (Rev. 1:1; 22:6). Any interpretative method that denies the predictive nature of the prophecies of Revelation does not do justice to the claimed intention of the book. This sets historicism as the adequate approach for prophetic interpretation. Historicism, as an interpretative method, recognizes that Revelation contains predictive prophecies describing the movements and events in Christian history from the first century up to and including the end time. This method also recognizes the spiritual relevance of the book to all Christians, regardless of time or place. By using this method, the preacher will present to the audience the full spectrum of the meaning of Revelation's prophecies as intended by its divine Author.

At this point, a caution would be in place. Historicism has often been misused in varied attempts to fit every

detail of the text into a historical fulfillment. Much preaching of Revelation's prophecies by historicist interpreters has been based on allegorical interpretation of symbols, with headline news and newspaper articles. A responsible exposition of Revelation's prophecy must be faithful to the text, rather than to what the preacher wants the text to say, as it relates to current events.

Revelation, itself, gives a warning against adding to or removing from the words of the book (Rev. 22:18, 19). Tampering with the prophecies of Revelation carries far-reaching consequences. On the one hand, to those who add to the prophetic words, God will add the plagues described in the book. This warning does not deal with tampering with the actual words of Revelation but rather with distorting and misinterpreting the prophecies of Revelation to suit one's own purposes. It also has to do with enforcing speculative ideas and views promoted by popular doomsday preachers. We must stay with what is clearly stated in the text and shun all speculative interpretations. On the other hand, taking away from the words of the book's prophecies may be done by deliberately undermining their divine origin and prophetic character because it might look unpopular or not be widely accepted. Such a person would be as equally guilty of tampering with the book's prophecies as the one who adds to it.

Do your own study

Much preaching of Revelation today proves to be nothing but stale repetition of well-known sensationalistic expositions of prophecy based on headlines, media news, and current events. This is done mainly by copying and preaching somebody else's ideas and views. There are at least two possible reasons for this: first, a lack of adequate training in biblical exegesis and in the use of biblical tools and second, intellectual laziness, leading to a neglect of engaging in personal interaction with the text.

Such preaching obviously does not offer a fresh exposition of Revelation's messages. In most cases, those in the

audience do not expect to hear anything new that would address their current situation and needs. All that they expect to hear would be what they have heard numerous times before articulated with different rhetoric. But, in truth, how much can they get?

For one thing, there is nothing wrong in consulting the interpretation and textual analyses of others, especially those who have more experience and are better qualified in studying the book of Revelation. However, a "sin" would be to neglect one's own study. Preaching is both science and art. Revelation must be studied with all scholarly robustness by using the hermeneutical tools available today. Like the rest of the Bible, Revelation must be studied in humility and with prayer and a willingness to let the book speak. Such preaching will be both educational and inspirational, and will result in the congregation confessionally responding, "Amen! Come Lord Jesus." This will, in turn, prompt them with a desire to reach with the gospel those who are still unreached for Christ.

Dealing with the text

An exposition of Revelation's prophecies goes through three stages: (a) exposition of the text itself; (b) interpretation of the prophetic text; and (c) application of the prophecy.

a. Exposition of the text. Preparation of a sermon on Revelation starts with an exposition of the text for the purpose of establishing its meaning. This means bringing out of the text what is there. We are not in control of the text but, rather, the text and the context defines the meaning. Expository preaching will protect us from imposing an interpretation that is not warranted by the text.

The first step involves an exegetical analysis of the text. It necessitates an understanding of the etymological and syntactical meaning of the key words and phrases. Like the whole New Testament, Revelation was originally written in Greek. An effective exposition of Revelation's text requires knowledge of the Greek language on at least a basic level. True, the listeners in the pew will

find the Bible in their own language to be enough for their practical spiritual needs. However, those who are called to explain the messages of Revelation to others—particularly from the pulpit—are mandated to consult the text in the original language. (Those who do not have training in Greek should secure several different translations in order to compare the differences and similarities in the translations.)

An understanding of the words implies both lexical and grammatical meaning as well as the relation of the words toward each other. Once the meaning of the key words and phrases is established, it is necessary to consider the text within its immediate and broader context. Finally, a determination needs to be made as to how the understanding of the text fits into the overall structure of the book as well as the Bible as a whole.

An exposition of the text requires basic tools. No preacher can be so knowledgeable and hope to expound the Bible so effectively that he or she can afford to ignore the help offered in scholarly books. Books are to the preacher what tools are to any profession. On the other hand, we must remember that books are just tools for unlocking the full spectrum of the meaning of a biblical text and not a substitute for the exposition of the text itself. Neither are books to take the place of prayer and personal involvement in studying the Bible.

b. Interpretation of the prophetic text. Once the meaning of the text is established, we turn to its interpretation. The preacher must be on guard not to impose on the text an interpretation just because it appears attractive. Interpretation of the prophetic text must not be controlled by popular interpretation, media headline news, or past and current events—a common practice among many preachers. Such preaching is commonly advertised to attract the public's attention with popular apocalyptic titles such as, "Armageddon at the Door" or "Revelation and the End of the World."

By this type of preaching, historical data and Revelation's texts are put

together and creatively intertwined to support preconceived ideas derived from current events. Such interpretations are speculative and can hardly be supported by textual evidence. They are usually based on allegorical interpretations and are superimposed upon the text. Any interpretation that is intended to stir up popular excitement is speculative and fictitious. This never results in the strengthening of faith in prophecy; in actuality, it weakens our confidence in biblical prophecy. In dealing with Revelation's prophecies, we must stay with what is clearly stated in the text and let the Bible interpret itself. Ellen White warns Adventist preachers: "We want not to move the people's passions to get up a stir, where feelings are moved and principle does not control. I feel that we need to be guarded on every side, because Satan is at work to do his uttermost to insinuate his arts and devices that shall be a power to do harm. Anything that will make a stir, create an excitement on a wrong basis, is to be dreaded, for the reaction will surely come."²

c. Application of the prophecy. As a final step, the preacher will wish to suggest how the prophetic text applies historically. In dealing with the prophecies that have been fulfilled in the past, we may try to locate their fulfillment in certain historical time periods. However, in dealing with the prophecies that are yet to be fulfilled, caution is necessary. In these prophecies, God reveals to us what will happen in the world at the time of the end, so that we may not be surprised. However, these prophecies do not tell us exactly *when* and *how* end-time events will take place. Some pastors see in these prophecies a constant temptation to speculate regarding their fulfillment. Books have been written and Web pages have been created predicting exactly when and how these prophecies will be fulfilled. However, most of the ideas expressed are fanciful and misleading, for they are drawn from imaginings based on allegorical interpretations or headline news rather than from the Bible.

The preacher must keep in mind that the timing and manner of the unfolding of the final events are secrets God has reserved only for Himself (Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:7). The full understanding of the end-time prophecies will be ultimately possible at the time of their fulfillment, not before. We must be careful, therefore, not to speculate on what the prophecy means or how and when it will be fulfilled. The purpose of the prophecies of Revelation is not to satisfy our sheer curiosity about the future but to move us to readiness as this world's history nears its end.

Study the structural organization of the book

It is of central importance for the interpretation of Revelation's prophecies to understand the book's basic structure. Apart from the prologue (Rev. 1:1–8) and the epilogue (Rev. 22:6–21), the main body of the book appears to fall into two distinct parts. In Revelation 1:19, John the Revelator states that what he has recorded in the book consists of (a) "the things which are" (which refers to the messages to the seven churches that are described in chapters 2 and 3) and (b) "the things which will take place after these things" (NASB; which refers to the things that are described in chapters 4 through 22 that will take place after the seven churches; cf. Rev. 4:1). These divisions are related to the three periods of history from the book's perspective:

a. "The things which are" (1:9–3:22, NASB). The seven messages were originally sent as a circular letter to the Christian congregations located in seven cities of the Roman province of Asia at the end of the first century (Rev. 1:11). That only seven churches were chosen suggests their symbolic significance—seven being a number of fullness. The seven messages sent to them are applicable on three levels:

1. *Historical application.* In exploring these messages, it is of primary importance to discover how they applied to the historical situations of the seven churches in Asia at the time of John.

2. *Universal application.* While those seven messages were originally written to the Christians of John's day, they were not written only for them; they also contain timeless messages for subsequent generations of Christians regardless of time or place.
3. *Prophetic application.* The fact that Revelation is a prophetic book (Rev. 1:3; 22:10) points also to the prophetic significance of those messages. The spiritual conditions of the seven churches correspond to the spiritual conditions of Christianity in different historical periods. The seven messages were thus intended to provide, from heaven's perspective, a panoramic survey of Christianity from the first century until the time of the end.

In a systematic preaching plan, a preacher can create a series of sermons on the messages to those seven churches. Good reference books render much information about the cities in which those churches were located as well as the challenges those Christians faced in their pagan environment. The preacher will be able to take a closer look at each message to discover the valuable lessons they provided for the Christians in John's day. Finally, it is necessary to show how each message applies to individual Christians today.

b. "The things which will take place after these things" (Rev. 4:1–22:5). Revelation 4:1 begins the prophetic section of the book. At this point, the scene shifts from earth to heaven and from John's time to the future. Careful analysis shows that chapters 4–11 describe the movements in Christian history and the spiritual struggles of the church in a hostile world from the first century until the time of the end. The focus of chapters 12–22 is the time of the end and the events leading to the coming of Christ. The book closes with God's triumph over the forces of evil and the establishment of His everlasting kingdom.

With Revelation 4:1, there is also a shift in language. In contrast to the first three chapters that employ

straightforward language and symbols and images generally not hard to understand, chapters 4–22 employ complex symbolic language reminiscent of Jewish apocalyptic literature, which is not easy to interpret.

Dealing with the symbolism of Revelation

The book of Revelation belongs to the genre of apocalyptic literature, characterized by complex symbolic language. The opening statement of Revelation tells us that the visions of Revelation were “signified” to John (Rev. 1:1, KJV). The Greek word *semainō* means “to show by symbolic signs.” By using this word, John the revelator tells us that the scenes and events to take place in the world were shown to him in vision in symbolic presentations. As a safeguard, the things that John states were shown to him in vision presuppose their symbolic understanding. The events predicted are real; they are, however, portrayed in symbols. What had been shown to him in the vision, he faithfully recorded in the book (verse 2).

Biblical prophecies were often communicated in the language of the time and place of the inspired author. One might observe, for instance, in the book of Daniel, how in revealing the future to King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians (chapters 2 and 7), God used the Aramaic language (the lingua franca of the Babylonian empire) and symbols that they could understand (e.g., an idol in chapter 2 and the wild beasts in chapter 7, symbols familiar to the Babylonians). However, in revealing the future to the Jews (chapter 8), the sacrificial animals from the Hebrew sanctuary rituals were used as symbols.

In the same way, the prophecies of Revelation were revealed to John in symbols understandable to him and the original readers. In interpreting those symbols today, preachers must be on guard against imposing on the text the current meaning of the symbol or a meaning derived by allegorical interpretation. Our understanding of

Revelation’s symbols must be guided by the intention of the inspired author and the meaning those symbols conveyed to the readers of Revelation of John’s day. Therefore, it is important to know where those symbols were taken from.

To adequately interpret the symbols of Revelation, a preacher must understand where those symbols have originated from. Many studies have shown that most of the symbolic language of Revelation was derived from the history and experience of God’s people in Old Testament times. The last book of the Bible is saturated with images and scenes from the Old Testament. In describing the events to take place in the future, Inspiration uses the language of the past. It is almost impossible to understand the symbolic language of Revelation without the Old Testament.

In addition to the Old Testament, the language of Revelation also reflects the language of Jewish apocalyptic literature, the first-century world of Asia Minor, and many sayings of Jesus and the apostles as recorded in the New Testament. To decode the meaning of those symbols, the preacher should equip himself or herself with good reference tools.

Effective preaching of Revelation is Christ-centered

The opening words of Revelation are, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:1). While this phrase shows that Revelation comes from Jesus Christ (subjective genitive), it also shows that the book is about Jesus Christ, the One revealed (objective genitive). While Christ would be the One who revealed the messages of the book to John, the book focuses on His self-revelation and post-Calvary ministry in heaven. He is the central object of the entire book. The book begins and concludes with Him.

As the name of the book shows, Jesus Christ is the main focus of Revelation. He is the key that unlocks the true meaning of the book’s content. Any exposition of

Revelation’s prophecies that focuses on events or people (whether past or future) at the expense of Christ and His relationship with His people entirely misses the central focus of the book.

On the other hand, the following clause states that the purpose of the book is to show God’s servant what will take place in the future (verse 1b). At this point, a question arises: how can a book titled “Revelation of Jesus Christ” be written with the purpose to unveil events that will occur in the future? For one thing, although future events occupy much of the book, these are seemingly not the book’s primary focus. Revelation was not intended to be a collection of predictions written to satisfy our obsessive curiosity about the future. The primary purpose of the predicted events that are recorded—whether those already fulfilled or those yet to happen—is to assure us of Jesus’s presence with His people throughout history and its final events.

Effective preaching of Revelation must be focused on Christ, not on events. Ellen White states: “Let Daniel speak, let the Revelation speak, and tell what is truth. But whatever phase of the subject is presented, uplift Jesus as the center of all hope.”³

In conclusion, preaching Revelation is complex yet fulfilling and rewarding. When understood properly, the prophecies of Revelation have practical purposes. Studying them will, first, move us to soul-searching and help us understand how we should live today while waiting for the future hope. Then, it will motivate us to take seriously our eternal destiny and to find our place in this world as we reach people around us with the gospel message. This should be the primary focus of preaching the last book of the Bible. ❧

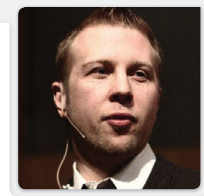
¹ Ranko Stefanovic is also the author of *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009).

² Ellen G. White, Letter 34, 1887.

³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1962), 118.

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Vanishing acts:

The homiletical praxis that hides preachers in the pulpit

God is good!" If ever a phrase competed with John 3:16 for the most times it was uttered in a pulpit, "God is good!" (with an expectant exclamation point) would be a strong contender. This call, with the expected refrain of "All the time!" has been used at camp meetings, youth rallies, potlucks, chapels, church services, and the weekly worship service. However true the statement, when a preacher ascends the platform, gazes out over the congregation, and declares, "God is good!" there is a good chance that the sermon will not be good and that the minister is about to perform a vanishing act before the congregation's very eyes.

What follows is how the vanishing occurs and why it damages the preacher's witness.

A need for context

The book of Proverbs says, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (Prov. 25:11, NKJV). The imagery belongs to the realm of metallurgists, jewelers, and sculpturers who, by their craft, take generic raw elements and transform them into intricate works of art that mirror life. Much like rocks and minerals, words must be mined, forged, and shaped into constructs that mirror life in order to help people make sense of the world.

Is God good? All the time? For everyone?

When a young mother attends church after recently losing her six-year-old son to a pediatric stroke—does shouting, "God is good all the time!" resonate with her life? Even if the statement is true in terms of God's character, will the middle-aged man who was laid off two years before retirement feel it? What about the visitor who has no idea whether they even believe in God, much less what to say when the speaker cries, "God is good!" waiting for some kind of response that everyone but the visitor seems to know. Finally, for the member whose life appears to function well, does this statement still carry any meaning? She has participated in it a hundred times, knows it by heart, and can say it without thinking or feeling or meditating on what God's goodness might mean.

The "God is good" phrase represents one of a thousand ways in which preachers may hide themselves in the pulpit. They may be strategically embedded throughout the sermon manuscript or kept in reserve for when the pacing of the preaching begins to lag. "God is in control!" "Jesus is coming soon!" "I've read the end of the book, and He wins!" "Our God is an awesome God!" "Everything happens for a reason!" Are these possibly preprocessed, shrink-wrapped phrases

deployed to acquire a quick "amen," rather than baking something from scratch? This is in contrast to the finest traditions of African-American preaching which employ the call-and response technique to great dialogical effect.¹

The preacher can also vanish when the pulpit becomes crowded with athletes, presidents, biblical commentaries, theologians, and anyone else who is willing to help reduce the amount of time a pastor actually has to say something original. Instead of "apples of gold in settings of silver," preachers hand out moldy fruit from a mental pantry that has not seen any fresh groceries since the owner graduated from seminary. The use of clichés, platitudes, and quotes—designed to elicit a quick response but in reality revealing a lack of personal experience and creativity—is a homiletical transgression. It stunts a congregation's spiritual intelligence and ruins homiletical ethos.

Aristotle and ethos

Classical rhetoric contains three main elements—logos (reason or argument), pathos (emotional content), and ethos (perceived goodwill or character). Of the three modes, Aristotle says the speaker's ethos "may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses."² Wayland Maxfield Parrish writes, "One of the

most important elements in persuasiveness is the impression made by the speaker's character and personality.³ He suggests "goodwill" and "fair-mindedness" can be found within the text of a presentation, as "most speeches are full of such indicators."⁴ When a speaker violates the element of ethos, he or she loses credibility in the eyes of the audience, and that audience may perceive the orator as an enemy instead of a friend, if they perceive him or her at all.

Many churches in the Western hemisphere suffer from a perceived lack of ethos within a post-Christian culture.⁵ So what happens when a preacher's sermon contains a conflagra-

Informational sermons rooted in secondary sources will not win converts.

tion of quotes, clichés, and platitudes? She disappears. Replacing her are disembodied others from the past or from other geographical locations, rhetorical relics from Christian subculture, a poem about footsteps, and a story about starfish. One begins to suspect that hiding behind all the secondary sources lurks a preacher who lacks personal experience or intelligence, or even both. One asks, "What is he trying to hide? Why does he never have any stories of his own? Why is it that so much of what is preached in church are things people are already aware of,

even before they came to church? This preacher, this community, must not have anything to say."

Saints elsewhere

Fred Craddock suggests that those who listen to gospel presentations regularly are often "victims" of "constant exposure to the same kind of light" and from the same source—resulting in sort of a spiritual farmer's tan.⁶ He points out that a speaker creates an existential absence through an overuse of "clichés, quotations, and secondary sources" that leaves listeners feeling "deceived and deprived."⁷ The preacher's calling involves more than quoting. Additionally, the existential absence of preachers leads congregations to believe that God may be somewhere else. If God always exists in quotes from other people, ancient texts, and stories from other lands, it means God is always somewhere else and never here; and if God is elsewhere, then the saints will realize they should be too. Sadly, some might suggest that an "existential absence" is the goal of preaching altogether. After all, Paul says, "Not I, but Christ" (Gal. 2:20, KJV), so we should disappear, right?

Incarnational reality

A common criticism of pastors (especially ones who dare to move ancient ark-sized pulpits to the side) goes something like, "The self must be seen"—implying preachers reduce the distance between clergy and congregation in the name of ego rather than ethos. Certainly ministerial egos exist and should be checked. However, the pages of Scripture reveal that divinity works with humanity.⁸

When it speaks of the Word of God, Scripture notes that "it is written," "it is useful" (2 Tim. 3:16, NIV), and that "faith comes by hearing" the Word (Rom. 10:17, NKJV)—but Scripture also says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14, NKJV). Christian pastors do not preach a disembodied Word; rather, we preach a resurrected living Word supposedly dwelling in our hearts. Some may see

unique uses of language, personal stories, humor, and personal reflection as arrogance; but in actuality 1 John 1:1, 2 states, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life" (ESV).

In commenting about contemporary Christian apologetics, rooted in a post-positivist modernity paradigm, Myron Penner complains that we have created a cottage industry of expert witnesses. He observes, "What we have across the board is the professionalization of Christian witness. Each of these apologetic models depends on skills and abilities that only a few 'brilliant' Christian thinkers possess."⁹ We have traded eyewitnesses for expert witnesses. John McClure suggests that each sermon contains an "intertext"—a "text lurking inside another, shaping meanings, whether the author is conscious of this or not."¹⁰ The intertext of a sermon laden with secondary sources rooted in academia subtly communicates that scripture is accessible only to academics and not to the speaker himself or herself. Informational sermons rooted in secondary sources will not win converts. How we live and share in our ministerial context gives far more instruction than what "someone once said."

Secondary sources and ethos

Secondary sources have their place in homiletics—mostly in the study—and occasionally pulpit cameos. Space does not permit an exhaustive set of rules, but a few principles may help increase ethos and authenticity in the preaching event. First, use secondary sources when speaking outside of your area of expertise. Often pastors express irritation when those trained in disciplines outside of theology and history take up the mantle of church theologian or historian. Equal irritation dwells in those trained in biology, medicine,

physics, psychology, animal husbandry, or linguistics when the local pastor waxes eloquent on subject matter foreign to their seminary experience.

Second, sources pertaining to current news or local events that affect the speaker and congregation can create an opportunity to engage in authentic dialogue with community voices from inside a shared experience. Local elections, natural disasters, or celebrations covered by news media, and featuring local voices, provide excellent windows into the church's mission context. Outside the local paper, the minutes of city council meetings or chamber of commerce meetings act as unique resources. However, the best resource is simply your being out in the community and relaying interactions and observations you have made personally.

Third, clichés and platitudes can be a great source of fun if one “defamiliarizes” them in order to highlight a new facet of truth. It is far easier to hook a drowsy congregation's attention with phrases such as “God is good, most of the time” than it is a cliché. Another way to defamiliarize involves exploring the etymology of popular sayings, and even Bible verses, to add a layer of meaning. For example, the oft-quoted Jeremiah 29:11 takes on new significance when parishioners are reminded that the passage comes in a letter informing God's people that they are headed into exile for 70 years. Maybe we should not crochet that text on a pillow after all.

Finally, couch secondary sources in terms of your own journey of experience. I have increasingly become aware of overusing pop culture artifacts through dialogue with parishioners and colleagues. However when a book, film, or event becomes part of my spiritual journey, it has the potential to reveal a shared experience with others who may be familiar with that artifact. Even if parishioners have no experience with the artifact in question, if it truly acts as a metaphor or catalyst for spiritual insight, it may indirectly invite them

into a shared experience. The same concept applies to reading certain theologians or commentaries, singing a particular worship song lyric, or any number of secondary “texts” that can lead to something original in your journey that you can speak to without making yourself disappear.

Conclusion

Every communicator must seek to develop “voice”—that unique creative quality that nuances reality when mediated through the artist. From Tim Burton to Eddie Van Halen to van Gogh, each artist that has mastered “voice” produces work that does not require anyone to say, “Who is this?” Their work possesses a creative seal that gives authenticity and authority in their respective fields. Sadly, the state of contemporary preaching reveals very few voices.

In discussing the state of preaching in America, one scholar laments a lack of original voices among his homiletics students. Carl Trueman asked his class to identify their “favorite model preacher.” He writes, “Not one of them mentioned any of the pastors under whose care they had grown up.” Instead they listed names “from that small and incestuous gene pool that is the megaconference speaking circuit.” He laments that these voices are “normative”—creating a “narrow range of voices and styles.”¹¹ It becomes difficult to claim credibility while consistently copying somebody else.

Tim Muehlhoff and Todd Lewis note that Christian communicators “borrow heavily and without shame from popular culture with T-shirts, bumper stickers, music, Christian talk-show formats and the like. And our redundancy and predictability have repercussions for our attempts at persuasion.” They warn communicators to “guard against boring our audience with trite and predictable jargon” and that believers must “adopt a communication approach that is low in predictability and high in information.” They criticize

the mind-set of evangelistic sermons as “rhetorical artifacts” infused with the power of automatically being able “to persuade others.”¹² If congregations sense that we simply borrow everyone else's material, our ethos vanishes.

Careful exegesis (embodying the faith we preach) and creative writing are both hard work and take immense time. The demands of visitation, administration, and, of course, family all bite chunks out of our schedules. Yet, when Christianity finds itself under intense scrutiny, we cannot sacrifice ethos and authenticity for convenience and cliché. Too many pulpits have heard Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Rob Bell, presidents, athletes, actors, and authors. However, they have yet to hear the voice of their pastor. ❧

- 1 “We would do well, therefore, to understand the dialogic nature of preaching. The best of what we call black preaching is the foremost example. . . . Based upon the African tradition of call and response, it involves the congregation in the preaching. Now this style has its excesses, to be sure . . . but any open-minded person who has been exposed to the genuine phenomenon will recognize its power and effectiveness.” Charles E. Bradford, *Preaching to the Times: The Preaching Ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1975), 102.
- 2 Wayland Maxfield Parrish, “The Study of Speeches,” in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl R. Burghardt, 4th ed. (State College, PA: Strata Publishing Inc., 2010), 28.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 41.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 42.
- 5 David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Good Faith: Being Christian When Society Thinks You're Irrelevant and Extreme* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016).
- 6 Fred B. Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1978), 28.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Ellen G. White, Manuscript 193, 1898.
- 9 Myron B. Penner, *The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 82.
- 10 Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), 150, quoted in John McClure, *The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2003), 9.
- 11 Carl Trueman, “Why Is So Much Preaching So Poor?” *Reformation 21*, Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, November 2013, www.reformation21.org/articles/why-is-so-much-preaching-so-poor.php.
- 12 Tim Muehlhoff and Todd V. Lewis, *Authentic Communication: Christian Speech Engaging Culture* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 84–87.

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“Something more in the way of organization”: Seventh-day Adventist ecclesiastical polity in historical perspective

Seventh-day Adventists are accustomed to being members of a worldwide church, so much so that probably many take it for granted, not realizing that Protestant denominations are mostly organized around national borders. Adventist ecclesiastical polity is unique and has helped a tiny movement, originating in the northeast of the United States, to become a global church. Adventists embraced a somewhat complex structure because they recognized that preaching the gospel is best facilitated by a robust and responsive church organization: it can direct (and in the Adventist case has directed) finances and personnel from the wider church to support dynamic evangelism, thanks to the resources committed. Structure twinned with powerful preaching has been a foundation of church growth.

Because its origins lie in the nineteenth century, however, the distinctive Adventist ecclesiastical polity is not well understood by many church members,

pastors, and administrators. One of the geniuses of its structure is the role of the union. While unique to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a union is roughly comparable to a diocese. It is the point of connection between the local or regional conference, and the General Conference, which is the overarching structure that spans the globe.¹ Yet the union is an example of organizational evolution. To understand why unions were created, their role in Adventist ecclesiastical polity, and the nature of their relationship with the larger whole, it is helpful to pose an obvious but rarely asked question: What is the General Conference?

Why a General Conference?

The term *General Conference* is so familiar in the Seventh-day Adventist Church that many, even within the church, never query the title or its significance. The founders of the Adventist Church used the word *conference* in two ways.

The first was for a general meeting of believers, a usage inherited from the Millerites, who, in the early 1840s, held a series of what they called general conferences.² Starting in 1852, so, too, did the seventh-day Sabbath-keeping adventists.³ A “general conference” was a conference, or meeting, with general application for all adherents rather than a local or regional focus. Like most ex-Millerites, the Sabbatarian adventists were initially suspicious of any form of organization and any group of believers that claimed to exercise wider authority.⁴ Yet, in the end, three general conferences of Sabbatarian adventists, held at Battle Creek, Michigan, in the early 1860s made important decisions for all their adherents. The result was the creation of a formal organization that once would have seemed inconceivable.

The first of these conferences, in September 1860, agreed that all local congregations should organize themselves legally and adopt a common name: Seventh-day Adventist. In



MAP SHOWING GENERAL CONFERENCE DISTRICTS OF THE UNITED STATES.

October 1861, the General Conference encouraged the newly organized Seventh-day Adventist churches to form state-based associations; churches in Michigan did so, creating what they called “the Michigan Conference.” In the next 15 months, six “state conferences” were created.⁵ Then, in May 1863, delegates from the six conferences founded the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. More than a periodic general meeting, it was also a permanent association, with a constitution, a model constitution that state conferences were obliged to follow, an executive committee, and three officers.⁶

Seventh-day Adventists, emerging out of other denominations, borrowed terminology from the Christian Connection, Mennonites, and Methodists and adapted organizational concepts from the Methodist Episcopal Church.⁷ Despite similarities, Adventism’s emergent ecclesiastical polity differed, at key points, from those of other contemporary denominations, even ones that used the terminology of *conference* and *general conference*.⁸

As this brief sketch indicates, starting in 1861, Sabbatarians used *conference* in a second sense: a permanent association that regulates the activities of its members. It was in this sense that the alliance of Seventh-day Adventist congregations in Michigan was called the Michigan Conference. In Adventist ecclesiastical polity, the conference

was (and is) a federation or association of local churches.⁹ What, then, was the *General Conference* a conference of?

As established in May 1863, it was originally an association of state conferences—hence the creation of a model constitution that all conferences had to adopt to become members of the General Conference (GC). It remained a conference of conferences until far-reaching organizational reforms at the 34th General Conference Session in 1901.¹⁰ Since then, it has been a conference of unions. Things changed because of increasing size and organizational complexity.

Growth and development

For the first 38 years of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it had three levels of denominational organization: local (the congregation); provincial (the conference); and whole church (General Conference). This worked well for a small sect restricted to the Northeast and Midwest of the United States. Largely thanks to the new GC’s emphasis on mission, however, the denomination expanded both geographically and numerically. The first overseas conference was admitted in 1880, when the 19th General Conference Session voted that “the conference in Denmark be received into the General Conference.”¹¹ As the denomination spread beyond the United States, the terminology of *state*

conference gradually dropped out of use, replaced simply by *conference* and by *mission* (a mission being functionally equivalent to the conference but with less autonomy).

At the end of 1866 (the first year for which we have statistics), the GC was made up of seven conferences, plus one mission, comprising 4,320 church members. By the time of the 1888 General Conference Session (one marked by both theological and intergenerational conflict), it comprised 32 conferences (5 outside the United States), plus 6 missions, with a total membership of 26,112 on 4 continents plus the islands of the Pacific. By the epochal 1901 session, the GC had 87 member conferences and missions comprising 75,767 church members drawn from every inhabited continent.

Rapid and widespread growth generated a need for a level of organization between the conferences and General Conference. As an American missionary leader overseas later recalled, “we . . . [felt] the need of something more in the way of organization to expedite our work.”¹² The 1882 General Conference Session approved a “European Council” to coordinate mission across the continent. The 1889 General Conference Session demarcated six “districts” in North America (see map). At the 1893 General Conference Session, Australasia and Europe were designated, respectively, Districts 7 and 8.¹³ A district, however, had neither a constituency nor a permanent headquarters, and GC leaders were unwilling to delegate much authority to them.

The emergence of the union

Outside North America, mission leaders were frustrated by the fact that “all matters outside of the conference must be referred to headquarters.” From Australia, as future GC president Arthur Daniells later recalled, it often took “three or four months before we could get any reply to our questions.” Sometimes it took “six or nine months” to “get the matter settled.” The church’s cofounder and prophet, Ellen G. White,

together with her son, Willie, both serving as missionaries in Australia, concurred with Daniells in believing that a new body was needed to handle “South Pacific Ocean questions, Australasian problems, so that any conference” in the region could get a decision “from a center of authority right there.”¹⁴

In 1894, the Australasian Union Conference was created; it elected Willie White as its first president. The terminology *union conference* denoted that, unlike a district, it was a union of conferences—it was, indeed, a conference of conferences, like the General Conference, but subordinate to it. Ellen White enthusiastically endorsed the move, and thus, although it had implications for Adventist ecclesiastical polity, leaders in Battle Creek had to accept the new type of organization, which was unique to Adventism. For the next seven years, however, GC leaders opposed adoption of the union model anywhere outside Australasia. As a result, even though Europe’s nine conferences and missions formed the European Union Conference in 1898, no unions were formed in North America before 1901.

1901 and the need for reform

By 1901, Adventist organization had become sclerotic. The GC was trying to administer 87 separate subordinate bodies, dispersed globally. Its insistence that *all* decisions above the conference level be referred back to Battle Creek frustrated more than foreign missionaries. From the US South, Edson White wrote to his mother, Ellen White, irate that the church’s administrative arteries were so hardened that “the General Conference . . . cannot or will not do anything” and wondering “why [they do] not stand aside & let those who will help do something?”¹⁵

On the eve of the 34th session in 1901, Ellen White, who had recently returned from mission service in Australia, told the assembled church leaders that there must be “a change . . . with the General Conference. . . We want to know what can be done right

here; . . . what can be done right now.”¹⁶ The die was cast.

It is notable that the principal advocates of organizational reform, including Ellen and Willie White, Arthur Daniells (elected GC president in 1901), and William Spicer (elected secretary of the Foreign Mission Board), had, as historian Barry Oliver observes, all recently “returned from extended periods of foreign missionary service,” and they sought reorganization to

all major decisions referred to the GC. Unions were given a considerable degree of operational autonomy, as leaders around the world had sought for a decade.

But there was another formal change in ecclesiastical polity too. Prior to 1901, conferences were represented at General Conference sessions but not on the GC Executive Committee, even though it had increased immensely in importance. In 1901, its membership



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enable further church growth around the globe.¹⁷ The most consequential reform was that unions were formed in the rest of the world; in fact, most of the church’s North American unions were formally organized during breaks in the session.¹⁸

The unions and the General Conference since 1901

The General Conference became a conference of unions. It remains so. The world divisions are subdivisions of the General Conference and its branch offices—not its constituency.

Along with unions replacing conferences as the members of the General Conference, there was a change in approach. After 1901, no longer were

numbered just 13; 11 were from North America. It emphatically was “not a representative body for a worldwide church.”¹⁹ One of the 1901 reforms made each union president an ex officio member of the Executive Committee. This made the committee far more representative. But it also bound the General Conference far more closely together. Now all member unions would be assured of having their voice heard.

Furthermore, the GC Executive Committee’s authority was increased, for the 34th session voted that it should “take the place of all the present general boards and committees.”²⁰ Completely independent associations, which had existed since the 1870s, henceforth became departments, under the authority of the Executive Committee.

As a result, unions thereafter had a say in the oversight of departments at the General Conference level, as well as at the union and conference levels, where departments also operate.

In sum, the 1901 reforms resulted in a more flexible form of organization and a more interdependent system of governance. Operational decision-making was devolved to unions, while authority on matters of wide concern was reserved to bodies representative of the whole denomination.


Conclusion

Seventh-day Adventists early in their history recognized that proclamation of the gospel is helped, not hindered, by effective structure. For this reason, they formed conferences in 1861, created the General Conference in 1863, and, from 1893–1901, established and eventually embraced unions: all for the purpose of proclamation and mission. In the words of Daniells, Adventists needed “more . . . organization to expedite our work.”²¹ Structure was not an end in itself. As Ellen White put it: “The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world.”²²

How do unions contribute to this goal? This is something church members and pastors often misunderstand. The crucial point is that, in Adventist ecclesiastical polity, unions are not merely *components* of the General Conference; they *constitute* the General Conference. Adventists tend to use “GC” merely for the headquarters; but it is much more: it is the sum of its constituent parts. Therefore, when the General Conference makes a decision, it is not something unions can *depart from* (though some church members or church leaders may not always *agree with* those decisions) because the General Conference, in a real sense, is not distinct from the unions. Decisions of General Conference sessions or, in constitutionally delegated areas, of the GC Executive Committee, are not the

expression of something other than the unions but, rather, the collective voice of the General Conference’s members. Because all have contributed to decisions, all have an obligation to carry them out.

In addition to enabling concerted action, the Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to rely on the connectivity that unions provide between conferences of local churches and the world church (GC) administration. The union is truly the pivot of the denomination, for it is the central point on which Adventist organization turns, though it is part of a wider machinery.

After the 1901 General Conference Session, Ellen White declared that the new model of organization based on “Union Conferences was God’s arrangement.”²³ The collaborative and interdependent nature of the General Conference, as a conference of unions, promotes unity and enables collective action and, thus, helps to lift up Jesus Christ, who has assured us that “I, when I am lifted up . . . will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32, NIV). 

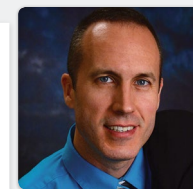
- 1 “Four levels of Church structure lead from the individual believer to the worldwide Church organization: The local church is made up of individual believers. The local conference, or local field/mission, is made up of a number of local churches in a state, province, or territory. The union conference, or union field/mission, is made up of conferences . . . within a larger territory (often a grouping of states or a whole country). The General Conference, the most extensive unit of organization, is made up of all unions/entities in all parts of the world.” There are also divisions: “sections of the General Conference, with administrative responsibility for particular geographical areas.” <http://www.nadadventist.org/article/19/about-our-church/organizational-structure>
- 2 Stephen D. O’Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 102, 103.
- 3 George R. Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth: The Development of Adventist Church Structure* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2006), 32. Sabbatarian adventists held what was termed a general conference in upstate New York in August 1852; however, its discussions were less significant than those at three general conferences held in Battle Creek in 1860, 1861, and 1863.
- 4 E.g., Knight, *Organizing*, 21–29.
- 5 The “state conferences” created were: Northern and Southern Iowa Conferences (consolidated to

“Iowa Conference” shortly after establishment), Vermont Conference, Illinois Conference, Wisconsin Conference, Minnesota Conference, and New York Conference.

- 6 See David J. B. Trim, “The Spirit of ‘63,” in *Adventist World*, June 2015, and in *Adventist Review: General Conference Bulletin*, no. 1 (July 5, 2015), www.adventistreview.org/1514-8.
- 7 See Andrew G. Mustard, “James White and the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Organization, 1844–1881,” (PhD dissertation, Andrews University, 1987), 253, 254, 258, 259; Andrew G. Mustard, “Seventh-day Adventist Polity: Its Historical Development” (Biblical Research Institute paper, n.d.), 4, www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/sites/default/files/pdf/AMustard-SDA%20polity.pdf.
- 8 See Mustard, “Development of Adventist Organization,” 261, 262; cf. Knight, *Organizing*, 16, 19.
- 9 This is evident in the way the church translates *conference* into Spanish (“*asociación*”) and French (“*féderation*”).
- 10 On organizational challenges in the late 1890s, the 1901 session and its reforms, and associated controversies, see the authoritative study of Barry D. Oliver, *SDA Organizational Structure: Past, Present and Future* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1989).
- 11 Nineteenth General Conference Session, third meeting, Oct. 12, 1880, in “General Conference Records,” vol. 2 (GC Archives, box 6873).
- 12 A. G. Daniells, speech at 38th General Conference Session, 13th meeting, May 22, 1913, *General Conference Bulletin* 7 (1913): 108.
- 13 Twenty-Eighth Session, 1889: 1st meeting, Oct. 18, 8th meeting, Oct. 25, 20th meeting, Nov. 5, *Daily Bulletin of the General Conference* 3 (1889): 8, 90, 155. Oliver, *SDA Organizational Structure*, 103.
- 14 Daniells’s speech (cited n. 11), 108.
- 15 J. E. White letter to E. G. White, June 18, 1899.
- 16 Ellen G. White, Manuscript 43c, 1901.
- 17 Oliver, *SDA Organizational Structure*, 291, 292.
- 18 Remarks made in the 30th meeting (April 23, 1901), “Organization of Southern Union Conference,” “Constitution and By-Laws of the Southwestern Union,” and Constitution[s] of the Lake, North West, and Eastern Union Conferences, *The General Conference Bulletin: Thirty-Fourth Session* 4, extra no. 19 and no. 2 (April 24, 1901): 442, 447, 449, 475–477.
- 19 Secretariat, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *A Study of Church Governance and Unity* (Sept. 2016), 22, www.adventistarchives.org/a-study-of-church-governance-and-unity.pdf.
- 20 “Summary of Proceedings of General Conference,” *The General Conference Bulletin: Thirty-Fourth Session* 4, no. 2 (second quarter, 1901): 501.
- 21 Daniells, 108.
- 22 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 9.
- 23 Quoted by Willie C. White at the 35th (1903) General Conference Session: 19th meeting (April 9, 1903), in *The General Conference Bulletin: Thirty-Fifth Session* 5, no. 10 (April 10, 1903): 158; printed in full in Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 232.

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Preaching Christ in the doctrines

It was the last night of the evangelistic meetings. The evening program had just concluded. I was on my way out the door when a church member who had attended the meetings regularly stopped me in the foyer. Her words startled me.

“I just wanted to tell you how much I appreciated these past few weeks,” she said. “I want to thank you for bringing out Christ in every message. These were the most Christ-centered meetings I’ve ever attended. If I had known they would be like this, I would have invited my friends.”

On one hand, I was thankful for her words of appreciation; on the other, I was disturbed that she had not invited her friends. I was compelled to ask her why.

She replied, “In the past, I brought my friends to evangelistic meetings, and I was mortified. Things were presented in a negative, condescending manner. Those who didn’t know these truths were made to feel as though they were ignorant or insincere. The speaker’s tone of voice was almost insulting. I didn’t hear much about Jesus. As my friends listened, I wanted to sink into the pew because I was embarrassed. Since then, I have not felt safe inviting friends to evangelistic meetings.”

Those words were seared into my consciousness. They reminded me of another lady’s words: “Lift up Jesus,

you that teach the people, lift Him up in sermon, in song, in prayer. Let all your powers be directed to pointing souls, confused, bewildered, lost, to the ‘Lamb of God.’ . . . Let the science of salvation be the burden of every sermon, the theme of every song.”¹ From then on, I determined to do exactly that.

How do we conduct Christ-centered evangelistic meetings? How do we preach Christ in every doctrine? How can we preach “the everlasting gospel” (Rev. 14:6) in a relational way that points people to a sin-pardoning Savior?

The first thing we have to do is ask ourselves three essential questions: (1) How does this doctrine point me to Jesus? (2) What does this doctrine tell me about Jesus’ love and character? (3) How does this doctrine point me to the Cross? After we have meditated on these questions, then we are ready to preach.

In this article, I will share some ways we can present biblical doctrines in a Christ-centered, positive, and relational manner.

Prophetic signs of the last days

The purpose of the signs of the last days should be to point people to Jesus and move them into a relationship with Him. Jesus uses the end-time signs as a bridge to get our attention and help us turn our eyes upon eternal things. He

allows us to see the hopeless condition of the world, so that we will realize our only hope for the future is in Him.

When talking about the signs, use 2 Timothy 3:1–5. Verse 5 explains that one of the signs is that there will be a “form of godliness” in the world, but it will have no power. Use this text as an opportunity to talk about how it is not enough to be religious on the outside, and that religious exercises in and of themselves will not satisfy our hearts. Explain that true religion means having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Then tell them what steps to take to have a relationship with Christ. Contrast the difference between religion on the inside and religion on the outside. Stress the importance of spending time with Jesus through a daily devotional life.

Do not just give them facts and figures. Give them the One whom the facts and figures point to—Jesus. Then tell them how to know Him, personally.

The Second Coming

Introduce people to the literal return of Jesus. Unfortunately, the focus sometimes ends up being an attack on the secret rapture. The heart of this message should not be a battle between two theologies—literal return versus secret return. The heart of this message should be about preparing people to meet Jesus. Talk to the congregation about whether they are ready

to meet Him. Ask whether they have the assurance of salvation. Then explain *how* they can have that assurance. If they do not have that assurance, it does not matter how Jesus will come because they will not be ready for Him.

Of course, it is important to understand the truth of His literal, visible, audible, and glorious coming (1 Thess. 4:15–17). There are many false doctrines that will lead people astray. If your only intention is to destroy the secret rapture doctrine, you will reach the head but not the heart. The primary focus should be on leading people to look at the return of Jesus with peace and assurance in their hearts. After all,

I know there are various views regarding the interpretation of the last week of this prophecy. Some want to move that final week into the future and create a seven-year tribulation with the antichrist coming in the middle, confirming a covenant, and eliminating the sacrificial system. Do not spend all your time combating alternative doctrine. Spend more time showing how the last week of this prophecy uplifts Christ and the Cross.

The 2,300 days

The 2,300-day prophecy (Dan. 8:13–16) is another Christ-centered prophecy, set in the context of the bibli-

Do not get caught up in trying to “prove” dates. By all means, expound on the dates involved in the prophecies of Daniel 8 and 9, while remembering that the whole point of this prophecy was not to prove a date but, rather, to draw people to an interceding Savior. You might conclude with Revelation 3:20, where Jesus knocks on the door and invites us to open our hearts to Him.

God's law

I used to spend all my time on proving that God's law was still binding. If I could prove that, I figured I had done my job. But where does Christ come in

The purpose of the signs of the last days should be to point people to Jesus and move them into a relationship with Him.

whether you believe Jesus is coming literally or secretly is irrelevant if you do not have a personal relationship with Him.

The 70 weeks

The 70-week prophecy (Dan. 9:24–27) is probably one of the most Christ-centered prophecies in the Bible. Its whole focus is on Jesus. Do not miss the opportunity to show how this entire prophecy uplifts Jesus and points us to Him as the Messiah who came to save us.

In Daniel 7:25, when it talks about how God gave Israel 490 years to return to Him, use this as an opportunity to talk about Christ's everlasting love and patience with us. Tell a story of how the Holy Spirit patiently pursues lost people. Share some of your own testimony of how God would not let you go.

cal sanctuary. Take time to explain the sanctuary services of the Old Testament and emphasize how the Lamb who was slain represents Jesus. Show them how to recognize what Jesus has done for them through these sacrificial offerings.

When you mention the Day of Atonement and the cleansing of the sanctuary, remind them that Jesus is eager to cleanse their lives and present them faultless before the throne. Share a story of someone's conversion and how Christ was able to cleanse them from sin. Explain how Christ's perfect and righteous life covers us and that we have salvation benefits both now and in the judgment.

Describe how Christ serves as our High Priest, constantly working in our behalf. Then spend some time sharing the principles of how to talk to Jesus, personally, and how to have a meaningful prayer life.

as the central focus? If all we do is prove the law is still binding, we are giving people only half the message.

We must point out how the law illuminates our failures and shortcomings for the purpose of pointing us to Christ and revealing our need for Him (Gal. 3:24). The law shows that “I need Jesus as my Substitute.” Explain substitution and how Jesus' righteous life is credited to us by faith alone, the heart of the gospel message.

This is an old illustration, but I love it. Rub dirt on your face, and then take a mirror and try to cleanse yourself by rubbing the mirror on your face. Your audience sees that this does not make you clean but, rather, makes things worse. The mirror can only reveal your need for water (Jesus). Then wash your face with water in their presence.

The mirror told you to go to the water. God's law tells you to go to Jesus

(cf. Jam. 1:18, 23-25). It gets the point across in a powerful way. Then use Matthew 11:28 to appeal to people to come to Jesus and be cleansed.

Sabbath

I used to be satisfied in establishing that Saturday is the Sabbath, but this is only “head knowledge.” I realized I was not doing justice to the subject and was missing a wonderful opportunity to uplift Jesus. I came to realize that the Sabbath is all about having a relationship with Christ (Mark 2:27, 28).

Explain that we cease from our labors so that we can spend personal time with Him in a way that we cannot the other six days. Go to Genesis 2:1-3, and emphasize that Jesus loves us so much that, from the beginning, He created a day on which to rest from His work in order to spend time with us. God created the Sabbath because He finds it so important to have a personal relationship with each of us! Illustrate how the Sabbath shows He has become a personal God to you.

Tell a story of two people falling in love and enjoying each other’s company. Show how this maintains the purpose of the Sabbath. We set aside our daily work agenda so that we can grow in an intimate relationship with Jesus and fall in love with Him.

Further explain that this is the reason why the devil hates God’s Sabbath. He despises anything that leads to us spending time with Jesus. This is why he has worked so hard to destroy the Sabbath. He hates the opportunity it affords us to spend time with Christ.

It might also be helpful to mention Colossians 1:15, 16, which identifies Christ as the Creator. Since the Sabbath was created as a memorial of Creation, the Sabbath uplifts Jesus as the Creator. In addition, Hebrews 4:4-10 uses the physical rest of the Sabbath to symbolize our spiritual rest in Jesus. In other words, we can stop worrying about not being good enough and rest our faith in Jesus. Salvation is based on His works, not on ours.

This means the Sabbath uplifts Jesus as the Redeemer. Therefore, if the

Sabbath uplifts Christ as Creator and Redeemer, this makes the Sabbath the most Christ-centered, grace-oriented teaching in the entire New Testament. Now that is worth sharing! So, do not just prove that the seventh day is the Sabbath; emphasize the relational aspect of the Sabbath and how it deepens our relationship with Christ.

State of the dead

Remember, the focus of the message would not be simply to prove that people do not go to heaven right after they die. That, too, is only head knowledge. Yes, you want that truth to be clear, but it is not the primary focus. The primary focus is that through Jesus there is hope of life after death. Emphasize Revelation 1:18, where Jesus says, “I have the keys of death.” He is the key to overcoming death and having eternal life. Repeat this throughout your message. It is filled with assurance.

Talk about the fact that when we sleep in the grave, Jesus shields us from all the pain and suffering of this world. Describe the resurrection, when Jesus calls people from the grave to be reunited with their families in a scene of inexpressible joy. Families will enter the kingdom of heaven and share eternity together forever (1 Cor. 15:51-54).

Tell a story of someone you look forward to seeing again. Ask the audience whether there is someone they want to be reunited with. Then appeal to them to have a saving relationship with Jesus.

Health

We must be careful not to come across in a legalistic way when presenting the subject of health (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Spending the whole time telling people why they should become vegetarian is not exactly Christ-centered.

Focus more on why Jesus is concerned with our physical health (3 John 2). One of the wonderful truths about Jesus is that He loves and cares for us personally. He is concerned not only about our spiritual life but also about our physical life here on earth.

Emphasize John 10:10, where Jesus expresses His desire for us to have a healthy, happy, and abundant life. Satan seeks to influence us to adopt habits that destroy health and ruin our happiness. Jesus seeks to protect us from such things and preserve our health and happiness.

You could picture Jesus as saying, *I created you. I formed your body with My own hands. It hurts Me to see you battling sickness, pain, and addictions. I am giving you some health principles to follow because I desire you have a good life. If you trust Me with your spiritual life, then trust Me with your physical life.*

When you present the subject of health from this perspective, Christ’s love for His created beings shines through clearly.

Jewelry and adornment

When it comes to the topic of adornment (1 Pet. 3:3, 4), too often we emphasize what we should not wear rather than what we should wear. Use Galatians 5:22, 23 to talk about the importance of putting on the character of Christ and the fruit of the Spirit. Emphasize how Jesus wants us to be a reflection of His character.

If we teach people to take off jewelry without teaching them to put on Christ, we are not enriching their lives spiritually. We do not want to create converts who wear no adornment on the outside but neither wear Christ on the inside. When Christ is put on in the heart, the outside will take care of itself.

The mark of the beast

The doctrine concerning the mark of the beast is not as difficult as it appears. Revelation 14:9-12 speaks about God’s commandments, which include the fourth commandment, and we have already established that the Sabbath is a Christ-centered doctrine. You will repeat many of those points in the mark of the beast message. The emphasis of this topic should be on more than the Sabbath, however. The emphasis should be on loving and following Jesus completely. The Sabbath is simply a tool that God uses to test that allegiance.

The mark of the beast message is really about surrender: Will I completely surrender my heart to Jesus and His teachings? Focus on the immeasurable love of Christ as revealed on Calvary. Show how Jesus surrendered all so that we might be saved. Tell the story of Gethsemane, when Jesus lay prostrate on the ground, sweating drops of blood, and yet cried, “Not my will, but thine be done” (Luke 22:42, KJV). Make the appeal that Jesus is asking us to make that same surrender.

When Calvary is truly understood, the Sabbath, the mark, and the seal of God (Rev. 7:1-3) will fall into place naturally. Always bring it back to the Cross.

The antichrist

Tell people that Jesus is so concerned about our spiritual lives that He warned us about an antichrist power that would be working in this world (1 John 2:18-22). Explain that this power would seek to take Jesus’ place in our lives as the supreme authority and Savior from sin. Tell them how this happened in a very deceptive way throughout the Dark Ages, a period of more than a thousand years. Remind them that Jesus loves us too much to let us be deceived, so He gave us some prophecies to warn us of this power.

You may be wondering, “Well, what shall I do about identifying the papacy as the antichrist power?” Lift up the truth, but be sure to emphasize that God is not condemning any specific group of people. Jesus warns of a *system* of beliefs that usurps His authority and His Word. There are people of differing persuasions who are rendering selfless service to God and humanity and are living up to all the light they know. We need to acknowledge that.

The antichrist system, which came from Rome in the Middle Ages, can be narrowed down to three basic principles:

- The commandments of men are placed above the commandments of God.

- Traditions are placed above truth.
- Human authority is placed above Jesus’ authority.

These are the principles of the beast. When we follow these principles in our lives, we are following the beast, no matter who we are or what church we come from.

Show that the principles of Jesus are just the opposite. They include these:

- The commandments of God are placed above the commandments of men.
- Truth is above tradition.
- Jesus’ authority is placed above human authority.

Point the people to the Cross of Christ and invite them to make a choice. Invite them to choose between the principles of Jesus Christ and those of the antichrist.

The remnant

The subject of the remnant is an extremely important issue (Rev. 12:17). Unfortunately, it can come across in a very arrogant way. Jesus never conveyed a “holier than thou” attitude. Neither should we.

When you talk about the interdenominational Advent movement of the early 1800s, it is very important that you do not present any notion of anyone being superior to everyone else. Jesus recognized that there were other people living up to all the light they had. In John 10:16, Jesus said He had sheep in different folds, but He was calling them into His one fold.

Do not put down different churches. You will never win people’s hearts by doing so, and even those who are not Christians will be turned off. Acknowledge the good in other churches. Remember that during the Middle Ages and the Reformation, various churches were used by God to help restore truth one link at a time. Each church may not have had all the

truth, but each contributed toward its restoration.

Then share from Revelation 12 how, in these last days, God has raised up a movement to emphasize two of the most Christ-centered truths—Sabbath and the Second Coming—to illustrate the beauty of being in the presence of God. Explain the progress of the Advent movement to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Explain that this church is a movement made up of people from all different faith backgrounds who have decided to embrace the liberating joy of following Jesus and His truth in these end times (John 8:32). Show how Jesus can use this movement to fulfill His desire to unite His people.

Then share Jesus’ invitation in 1 Peter 2:9 and Revelation 18:4, where Christ invites us to come out of darkness and error and follow the Light of the world above everyone and everything else.

Conclusion

These are some simple ways to center biblical truths on Christ during evangelistic meetings. When we do this, I believe God will honor and bless our work. However, the best way to preach Christ in the doctrines is to have Christ in the center of your own life. When Jesus lives in your own heart in a deep and personal way, your preaching will come from a heart that knows Him intimately.

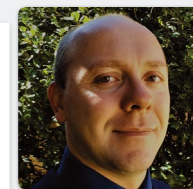
There is no substitute for this. It will have a powerful influence. You will no longer be just preaching. You will be sharing a testimony of how Jesus is your all in all. “Your success will not depend so much upon your knowledge and accomplishments, as upon your ability to find your way to the heart.”² You can reach their hearts only when Jesus lives in yours. 🙏

1 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1915), 160.

2 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), 437.

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Ellen White and the essence of preaching

What Seventh-day Adventist pioneer Ellen G. White said about preaching is a wonderful contribution to pulpits all around the world. Of the material she wrote on the mode and content of preaching, two factors strike as foundational. First, she directed ministers to focus on the Bible as the source of all preaching. “Let the Word of God speak to the people. Let those who have heard only traditions and maxims of men, hear the voice of God, whose promises are Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus.”¹ Second, she held that at the core of preaching—in content and in appeal—should stand Jesus Christ. “Jesus is the living center of everything. Put Christ into every sermon. Let the preciousness, mercy, and glory of Jesus Christ be dwelt upon until Christ is formed within, the hope of glory.”²

This article will show that a biblical and Christ-centered approach to homiletics is essential to ensure that the gospel is preached with power and conviction. The article will also explore the domino effect of not applying such counsel in contrast to the results of its faithful application.

The goals of preaching

Biblical exposition. According to Ellen White, the first goal of preaching is to present to the audience what the Bible says in a particular passage or about a specific topic. A biblical sermon

should expound the biblical text and make it “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17, NASB).

Ellen White alludes to preachers who would often begin with a text from the Bible and then end up preaching from “the newspapers.”³ She warns, “If ministers who are called upon to preach the most solemn message ever given to mortals, evade the truth, they are unfaithful in their work, and are false shepherds to the sheep and the lambs. The assertions of man are of no value. Let the Word of God speak to the people.”⁴

God alone can provide insight and understanding, and that comes from a study and presentation of the Word. White wrote: “Oh, that it might be said of ministers who are preaching to the people and to the churches, ‘Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures!’ (Luke 24:45).”⁵

When preachers study the Bible personally and prayerfully before they take the pulpit, they will discover treasures and beauty in each verse. “If we study the word of God with interest, and pray to understand it, new beauties will be seen in every line. God will reveal precious truth.”⁶

White says further on this topic of being led by the biblical text: “The

Word of God is to be his [the minister’s] guide. In this Word there are promises, directions, warnings, and reproofs, which he is to use in his work as the occasion may require.”⁷

Christ-centered approach. Second, Ellen White commends a Christ-centered approach in preaching. A sermon that does not have Jesus Christ at its heart does not qualify as a sermon. Even today, countless sermons either do not mention Jesus or make only meager references to Him.⁸ White highlighted this grave error in one of her indictments of the preaching of her time: “There have been entire discourses, dry and Christless, in which Jesus has scarcely been named.”⁹ She further wrote, “In our ministry we must reveal Christ to the people, for they have heard Christless sermons all their lives.”¹⁰

Throughout much of Adventist history, there have been problems with Christ-centered preaching. The General Conference session of 1888 finds two sides forming in the church: on the one side, righteousness by faith in Christ; on the other side, righteousness by faithfulness to the law. Trusting in Jesus was at odds with trusting in one’s obedience. During this time, Ellen White remained consistent in her call to Christ-centered preaching. She appealed for the centrality of Jesus in sermons and practical daily life.¹¹

The true call for introspection comes from her appeal to everyone

who wants to enter the ministry: “Dare not to preach another discourse until you know, by your own experience, what Christ is to you.”¹² Christ-centered sermons come from Christ-centered preachers.¹³

Ministry to others. According to White, the most practical goal of preaching is ministry to people. Just as counseling, healing, and Bible study are pastoral ministries, so is preaching a ministry, and a significant one at that. When a minister of the Word appreciates this fact, then he or she will be humbled, and the approach to writing a sermon and presenting it to the congregation will be impacted accordingly. Ellen White counsels the preacher, “With a humble heart and a willing mind he is to search this Word, that for the benefit of others he may draw from the storehouse of truth things new and old.”¹⁴

Results of not following her counsel

When an Adventist preacher departs from the biblical text and does not have a Christ-centered focus, a domino effect results. We can review five such outcomes that befall such a preacher and his or her preaching: (1) the Bible is no longer the authority of the preaching; (2) the preacher replaces the authority and voice of the Bible; (3) the preacher is alienated from the congregation; (4) God is removed from the pulpit; and (5) legalism begins to thrive.¹⁵ Skipping over words of Scripture, or reading into the text what is not there, results in bad exegesis, bad hermeneutics, and bad homiletics.

When the Bible is no longer the authority, a hermeneutic of “I” may creep into the sermon, and the preacher becomes the source of authority. Taken from another sermon, the preacher says: “My friend, I want to tell you, on the *authority* of years of experience . . .” What he’s saying here is, “I would say no,” or “I would say yes.”¹⁶

When the preacher assumes this position of authority, he or she loses the connection with the congregation. When this authority is assumed from

the pulpit, the speaker is isolated, viewed as already living the demands that the sermon will be demanding from the congregation.¹⁷

Since the Bible is muted and the preacher takes the position of authority, God is also removed from the pulpit. For a sermon on Joshua 3:5, the preacher may say: “God *wants* to go before you. God *wants* to lead you. God *wants* to help you. . . . The Jordan story tells us what *we must* do.”¹⁸

Sadly, the preacher places God on the sidelines. God wants to act but cannot. Why? Because, in this case, the congregation has to act first. Between the amazing acts of God in the past and His amazing acts in the future, the preacher inserts the acts of the congregation in the present. The focus of the sermon falls on the acts of man and not on the acts of God. Effectively, God is made impotent and removed from the pulpit. The ultimate outcome of this, then, leads the preacher into a legalistic arena. When the Bible becomes mute, the preacher takes up the authority, and the pulpit is devoid of God: and the final domino, legalism, falls. Continuing with the above example of the sermon on Joshua 3:5, the preacher starts a sequence of imperatives: “you must . . . we must . . . you must.”¹⁹

In this scenario, the preacher fails to show the miraculous acts of God in the past, present, and future. As a substitute, he or she has directed the attention of the people to themselves. Only through their deeds can God now be triggered into action.²⁰

White’s cautions in sermon preparation

Ellen White gave several cautionary guidelines for sermon writing. One of these guidelines was to present a clear and proper exposition of the Biblical text. Although she never used the homiletical term *dis-exposition*, White does point out this error in several places.²¹ One example is in *The Great Controversy*: “In order to sustain erroneous doctrines or unchristian practices, some will seize upon passages of Scripture separated from the

context, perhaps quoting half of a single verse as proving their point, when the remaining portion would show the meaning to be quite the opposite. . . . Thus do many willfully pervert the Word of God. Others, who have an active imagination, seize upon the figures and symbols of Holy Writ, interpret them to suit their fancy, with little regard to the testimony of Scripture as its own interpreter, and then they present their vagaries as the teachings of the Bible.”²²

This passage warns the preacher against (1) using verses out of context, (2) quoting texts to substantiate personal arguments, (3) imaginative interpretations of symbols and figures, (4) imposing onto a text one’s own view, and (5) presenting personal notions as instructions of Scripture.²³

Another wise caution in sermon preparation can be found in Ellen White’s answer to a question raised by Halbert M. J. Richards the father of the founder of the *Voice of Prophecy*, H. M. S. Richards, Sr. When asked, “How should I use your writings in preaching?” Ellen White replied: “Here’s the way to use them. First, ask God to give you your subject. When you have the subject chosen, then go to the Bible until you know for sure what the Bible really teaches on that point. After that, turn to the writings and see what you can find on the same subject and read that. It may cast light on it or guide you into other scriptures or make some point clearer. When you go to the people, however, preach to them out of the Bible.”²⁴

Her counsel, if followed, will ensure that the Bible will remain the sole source of authority in preaching. The preacher will go before the people as their fellow servant, God will remain in the pulpit, and legalism will not easily find a foothold.

Conclusion

While this article is not a complete discussion of Ellen White’s thoughts on homiletics, it attempts to elucidate the essential components of sermon preparation and presentation. It shows that the goals of preaching are to be

biblical, Christ-centered, and a ministry to others.

One unifying component present throughout this discussion is that the biblical text must remain foundational in the preparation and delivery of a sermon. After all, the heartbeat of the sermon is energized by its substance, essence, and content.²⁵ This is where White places her emphasis. For her, as shown earlier, the sermon begins and ends with the Bible text.

We have also noted the domino effect of not following her guidelines: the Bible is muted as authority; the person of the preacher replaces that authority and voice; the preacher becomes alienated from the congregation; God is sidelined from the pulpit; and legalism begins to take a foothold.

The essence of homiletics in the teaching of Ellen White is that the preacher (a) has a personal relationship with Jesus, (b) is able to translate that

relationship into a living testimony, and (c) studies the Bible and brings it to the listeners. When this is followed, the pitfalls can be avoided and the gospel can be freely preached with power—that is why Ellen White could write that preaching should be “God’s chosen agency for the salvation of souls.”²⁶ 📖

- 1 Ellen G. White, *Pastoral Ministry* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1995), 188.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), 186.
- 3 Ellen G. White, “Spiritual Benefit the Object of Camp-Meetings,” *Review and Herald*, June 23, 1891. Cf. White, *Pastoral Ministry*, 188.
- 4 White, *Pastoral Ministry*, 188.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 3 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1980), 188; cf. White, *Pastoral Ministry*, 189.
- 6 White, *Pastoral Ministry*, 189.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 J. Cilliers, *Die uitwissing van God op die kansel* (Kaapstad: Lux Verbi, 1996), 2.
- 9 Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 8 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), 271.

- 10 Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 17 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), 74.
- 11 See Mervyn Warren, “But Where Is the Lamb?: An Ancient Question for Modern Pulpits,” *Ministry*, Dec. 2007, 19.
- 12 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1962), 155.
- 13 See White, *Pastoral Ministry*, 192.
- 14 Ibid., 189.
- 15 Cilliers, 140, 141.
- 16 Ibid., 86, 87, emphasis added.
- 17 Ibid., 96, 97.
- 18 Ibid., 102, 103, emphasis added.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid., 42.
- 21 See Nestor C. Rilloma, “The Divine Authority of Preaching and Applying the Word: Ellen G. White’s Perspective in Relation to Evangelical Viewpoints,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 16, nos. 1–2 (2005): 166.
- 22 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1939), 521.
- 23 Rilloma, 166.
- 24 J. R. Spangler, “The Editor Interviews H. M. S. Richards,” *Ministry* (Oct. 1976):5–7.
- 25 Mervyn A. Warren, *Ellen White on Preaching* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2010), 9.
- 26 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 87.

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10 DAYS OF PRAYER

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▶ William Scales Jr., a well-known evangelist, passes to his rest.

Birmingham, Alabama—William Clinton Scales, Jr., a pastor, and evangelist who spent his life in service to the Lord, passed away on May 27, 2017, at the age of 82. Approximately 750 attended a celebration of his life and legacy on June 11, 2017, at Oakwood University Church in Huntsville, Alabama.

Throughout his career, Scales conducted many public evangelism campaigns, baptizing thousands and establishing new churches. This year, despite being ill, Scales was planning an evangelistic campaign for this summer. And at the time of his death, he was serving as pastor of the Bessemer First and Brent Seventh-day Adventist churches.

“William Clinton Scales, Jr. represented a genre of Adventist preachers who clearly saw their ministry as a ‘calling’ rather than a ‘profession,’” said **Alvin Kibble**, vice president for the North American Division (NAD), and friend and colleague of Scales.

Scales officially retired in 1997, after being appointed the NAD’s first Ministerial Association secretary in 1986. During this time, Scales helped train hundreds of pastors using evangelistic materials he helped create. In 1997, he was inducted into the Martin Luther King, Jr. Collegium of Preachers and Scholars at Morehouse College. Before his tenure with the NAD, Scales served as associate secretary of the General Conference Ministerial Association from 1978 to 1985.

Scales gave his heart to Christ after almost dying in a car accident in Ohio when he was 8. He promised God that he would become a preacher and devote his life to evangelism. Scales married Lois Yates (1934-1998) in 1958.

Scales began pastoral ministry in the Central States Conference.



Ordained in 1962, he served in Allegheny Conference (later in Allegheny East Conference) for many years. He worked with Cleveland to hone an evangelistic ministry approach known as the Real Truth program. This program, strongly influenced by the Ellen G. White

book *Evangelism*, promotes a holistic approach to evangelism. His program includes presenting the gospel, health principles, family enrichment, youth outreach, music, literature evangelism, and special emphasis on lay member involvement.

Scales is survived by his wife, Pat, whom he married in 1999; two children; three step-children; nine grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren. [Kimberly Luste Maran, NAD Communication]

▶ A mission to Mongolia fulfills an ancient request

Mongolia—In A.D. 1266, the great **Kublai Khan**, leader of the Mongol Yuan dynasty, asked two Italian merchantmen to return home with a letter requesting 100 well-educated Christian missionaries to come back and teach his people about the gospel. Unfortunately, Kublai Khan’s desire was not fulfilled at that time; until now!

Seven hundred and fifty years later, a ministry called *It Is Written* (IIW), in partnership with the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Mongolia, responds to this ancient request, focusing its attention on Mongolia, a country with



Photo credit: Northern Asia-Pacific Division

97 percent non-Christian population, with a life-saving message of hope.

The IIW team, along with the Mongolia Mission, held a large evangelistic campaign, June 2017, named *In What Can You Trust?* Altogether, more than 120 volunteer missionaries came from abroad, and 14 churches and companies in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar got involved in this bold missionary challenge. On the last day of the series, 71 people were baptized.

“Since 2015, IIW has been actively involved in humanitarian and gospel work to help Mongolians get a clearer picture of Jesus as their help in this world and their hope in the world to come,” said **Erik Flickinger**, associate speaker for the ministry.

Humanitarian work began in 2015 by drilling water wells at local churches where the local community had no access to fresh and clean drinking water. Today, three churches have hot and cold running water and can attract people who otherwise might not take notice of them.

The “Mission: Mongolia” project involved medical, dental, and optical clinics as well as nightly Bible presentations by IIW speaker/director **John Bradshaw**. More than 700 people attended.

“More than 70 precious souls publicly confessed their love for Jesus through baptism,” said **Yves Monnier**, IIW evangelism director. “I had the honor of baptizing a young lady with

muscular dystrophy. I just cradled her small body in my arms, and we both went down in the water,” he said. “You should have seen her when we came up out of the water: smiling and crying all at the same time.”

Monnier asked church members around the world to keep praying for Mongolia, as locals keep working with others who are continuing to study. “Hundreds more are now being prepared for future baptisms,” he said.

In Mongolia, it seems that Kublai Khan’s original request is being fulfilled thanks to the efforts of Adventist missionaries who proclaim a better, everlasting empire, and the coming of a new Khan (King)! [Yure Gramacho, Northern Asia Pacific Division]

► Barry Black and Wintley Phipps in National Day of Prayer

Washington, DC—For the National Day of Prayer, an interdenominational service took place Thursday, May 4, 2017. It was hosted by recently appointed chair of the National Day of Prayer Task Force, **Anne Graham Lotz**, a daughter of Billy and Ruth Graham.

Music was provided by Seventh-day Adventist pastor and vocalist, **Wintley Phipps**.

Ruthie Jacobsen, prayer ministries coordinator of the North American Division, commented, “United States Senate chaplain **Barry Black** led the packed hall in a prayer that gave us the sense we were in the very presence of God.” Lotz added, “U.S. Senate Chaplain Barry Black followed Wintley, leading us in a prayer that not only invoked God’s presence, but stirred the audience to ‘Amen’ and applaud.”

Jacobsen stated that another transformational moment was a message delivered by Anne Graham Lotz. “She led us carefully through Daniel’s prayer (Dan. 9) and called the country to focus



Photo credit: R. Walters/Light Prod.

on some specific personal and national sins, with an earnest call to repentance, personally and for our nation.”

The evening concluded, as it had begun, with song. Lotz stated, “Wintley Phipps led us in singing what has become known as our national

hymn, “Amazing Grace.” The last verse brought us to our feet as we sang with him, ‘When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise, than when we’d first begun.’” [Ruthie Jacobsen and Anne Graham Lotz]

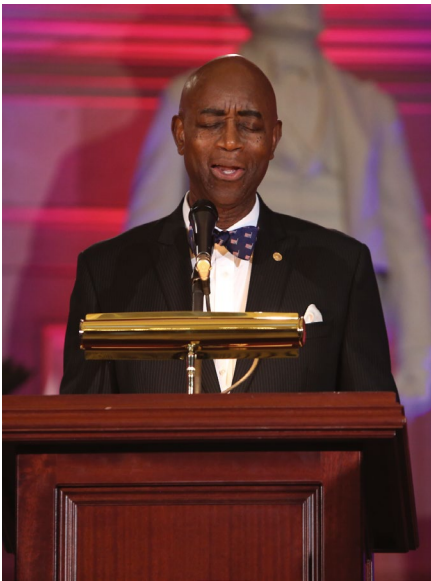


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A house of prayer for *all* people

Revival & REFORMATION

I was not sure what I would find as I sought out a place of worship in the sprawling city. After riding in a car and on a ferry and then walking up a hill, I found the church. I was greeted with graffiti scrawled on the wall surrounding the house of worship: “God hates us all.”


I knew this was the expression of many: people oppressed by their government, perplexed by an endless stream of refugees, and disheartened by the daily challenge of survival.

But what I found *inside* the walls was incredible: warm hospitality and the bonds of Christian friendship; members giving up their seats to visitors who walked in off the street and; open invitations for visitors—people who rarely, if ever, cross the threshold of a Christian church—to join them for lunch.

While I listened to the sermon in English, it was being translated. Later I discovered that the translator was miraculously converted through a dream, led back to his home country, and placed by God as a worker in this little church. He also helps distribute Bibles and other literature and connects with visitors. Hundreds of books are given out each week.

In a country filled with political and social tension and hostility to Christianity, the work of this church is vulnerable at best. Only the grace of God sustains it—grace they actively seek. Recently church leaders in this region launched an aggressive prayer campaign, believing that the impossible challenges of mission can be solved only as God’s people seek His transformative power.

Now, I know that God does not bestow spiritual gifts simply because the church comes up with some new program. But we do know that when His disciples, long ago, banded together in humble, fervent prayer, God responded in Pentecostal power and shook the world!

It is not too early for your congregation to plan for a corporate prayer experience this January 2018. It may just transform your church! For more information, visit www.tendaysofprayer.org. 

—Jarod Thomas serves as communications manager for the General Conference Ministerial Association, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

Fred Hardinge, DrPH, RD, is an associate director of the General Conference Health Ministries department, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



Five questions to challenge your nutrition savvy

As pastors, you are expected to know information on a wide variety of topics. That is not always fair, but it is true! The beauty of health is that it is not just head knowledge; it preserves ministry and saves lives. So, let us see how you fare on these five important areas of basic nutrition:

1. T or F: Whole grains provide significant amounts of the B vitamins, including vitamin B₁₂.

False. Whole grains are excellent sources of important B vitamins, but they do not contain any vitamin B₁₂ (also called cobalamin). This vitamin is found only in animal products and some fortified foods. Pernicious anemia and serious neurological disorders may occur if you do not get enough. Those who choose to be total vegetarians (animal free diets) must eat sufficient foods fortified with vitamin B₁₂ and/or take a supplement (recommended for everyone over 65 years, no matter what their diet).

2. T or F: Complex carbohydrates, such as whole meal flour and brown rice, are more nutritious than white flour or white rice.

True. Yet, a quick trip to the grocery store (see also restaurant menus and school lunches) will show we are still in love with white bread, white rice, white pancakes, and white pastries, and other refined grain products. Refining grains increases shelf life and mouth appeal but unfortunately removes a large percentage of the health-promoting dietary fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Remember, whole grains

are a “complete package” of good things, unlike refined grains, which are stripped of many valuable nutrients.¹

3. T or F: Cholesterol is found only in animal products.

True. Cholesterol is a waxy, fatlike substance that is found in every cell of the body. We need cholesterol to make hormones and many enzymes. However, your body can manufacture all the cholesterol you need. It is also found in some of the foods from animals we eat—like milk, eggs, and flesh foods. The cholesterol your doctor measures in your blood may or may not have originated from the food you consume! Minimizing dietary cholesterol can help control your serum cholesterol.²

4. T or F: A plant-based diet may include beef, chicken, or fish.

True. A plant-based diet literally means that the foundation foods come from plants. Some people use this phrase to mean a vegetarian diet. Others use it to describe a diet that includes meat, fish, or dairy products in a supporting rather than a starring role. A plant-based diet, whether vegetarian or not, is at the heart of positive nutrition recommendations that promote overall health and reduce the risk of cancer. For the best nutrition, fill at least two-thirds of your plate with vegetables, whole grains, beans, and fruit!

5. T or F: Raw foods best provide all the nutrients needed by humans to support health.

False. While eating raw foods is becoming very popular today,

remember Jacob cooked lentils (Gen. 25:29) and a recipe for baking bread was given to Ezekiel (Ezek. 4:9). So cooking is biblical, too! It is also beneficial. Heat breaks apart plant cells, releasing nutrient-rich fluids. It also kills pathological bacteria, making the food safer. Raw foods have high nutrient content, are rich in dietary fiber, and tend to be low in calories, promoting weight loss. Healthy meals should include both cooked and raw food.

Healthy eating for pastors is not difficult—unless we make it so! The ingredients necessary for good health and peace of mind are (1) a willingness of spirit; (2) a basic understanding of nutrition, and (3) an absence of worry. Ellen White states, “Some are continually anxious lest their food, however simple and healthful, may hurt them. To these let me say, Do not think that your food will injure you; do not think about it at all. Eat according to your best judgment; and when you have asked the Lord to bless the food for the strengthening of your body, believe that He hears your prayer, and be at rest.”³ Bon appétit! 🍴

1 “The Nutrition Source: Whole Grains,” Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, accessed Aug. 15, 2017, www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/whole-grains/.

2 “Cholesterol 101: A Basic Introduction to Cholesterol,” American Heart Association, accessed Aug. 15, 2017, www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/Cholesterol/AboutCholesterol/About-Cholesterol_UCM_001220_Article.jsp#.WWP41MaZNoM.

3 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1942), 321.

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PASTOR'S

APPRECIATION DAY

**"AS THE FATHER HAS SENT ME,
I ALSO SEND YOU."**



John 20:21, NKJV



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"Coming home from school, I would always feel sick when I saw my house. I'd drop my things on the porch and refuse to go inside. I don't remember ever voluntarily going in that house."

—Ty Gibson



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